

THE INDYPENDENT

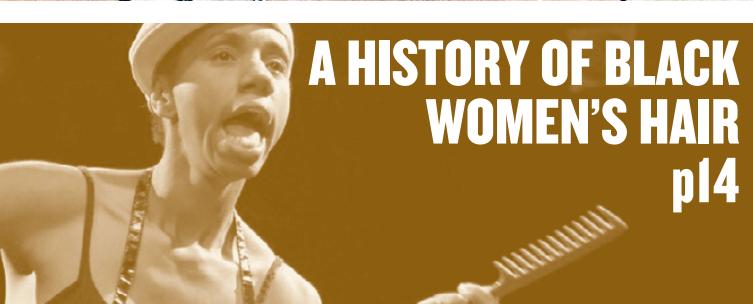
Issue #99, February 22 – March 14, 2007
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

These Wars Demand the Times

Paper of Record
Pushes Iran Attack

Chris Anderson,
p 10

IRAN



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WHAT IS INDYMEDIA?

With autonomous chapters in more than 150 cities throughout the world, the Independent Media Center is an international network of volunteer media activists.

The IMC seeks to create a new media ethic by providing progressive, in-depth and accurate coverage of issues. We are a community-based organization using media to facilitate political and cultural self-representation. We seek to analyze issues affecting individuals, communities and ecosystems by providing media tools and space to those seeking to communicate. We espouse open dialogue and placing the means of communication and creativity back in the hands of the people, away from the drive of profit.

The *Indypendent* is funded by benefits, subscriptions, donations, grants and ads from organizations and individuals with similar missions.

WHAT CAN I DO TO GET INVOLVED?

The IMC has an open door. You can write and distribute for *The Indypendent*, videotape events and rallies, update the website, self-publish articles to the web, take photos or just help us run the office. As an organization relying on volunteer support, we encourage all forms of participation.

The print team reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity. We welcome your participation in the entire editorial process.

VOLUNTEER STAFF:

Sam Alcoff, Nicholas Allanach, Chris Anderson, Steven Arnerich, Kazembe Balagun, Gino Barzizza, Charlie Bass, Bennett J. Baumer, Leila Binder, Jed Brandt, Mike Burke, José Carmona, Antrim Caskey, Kepfram Cauley, Susan Chenelle, Linnea Covington, Ellen Davidson, Lauren Denitzio, Ryan Dunsmuir, Jeff Faerber, David Ferris, Karen Fu, Leo Garcia, Sandya George, Samantha Gorelick, Liana Grey, A.K. Gupta, Lejia Hanrahan, Mary Heglar, Dennis Ho, Irina Ivanova, Gillian Kalsom, Ruth Kelton, Ula Kuras, Jessica Lee, Gary Martin, Edgar Mata, Clark Merrefield, Nik Moore, Ana Nogueira, Erica Patino, Donald Paneth, Nicholas Powers, Frank Reynoso, Ann Schneider, Andrew Stern, Sarah Stuterville, John Tarleton, Xavier Tayo, Erin Thompson, Chloe Tribich, Carly Triche, Hannah Vahl, Stephanie Wakefield, Matthew Wasserman, Steven Wishnia, Amy Wolf & Christina Zawerucha

COMMUNITY CALENDAR february–march

Please send event announcements to indyevents@gmail.com.

FEB 1 – MAR 31

EXHIBIT: UNITED BLACK GIRLS
Exhibition about attitude and aesthetics brings together six artists whose work explores representations of the black woman in popular culture.
Rush Arts Gallery, 526 West 26th St.
212-691-9304 • rushartsgallery.org

FEB 22 – MAR 3

7pm • \$20 adults; \$15 teens (12-17 yrs.)
PERFORMANCE: THE DANCE
THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN MINSTRELS.
Richmond Shepperd Theatre,
309 East 26th St.
212-868-4444 • smarttix.com

SAT FEB 24

7pm
FILM: TV'S PROMISED LAND
75-minute montage of found footage demonstrating the creation of an "Arab/Muslim" world via selective and biased coverage.
Kim's Video, 88 Pavonia Ave., Jersey City.
973-954-2521 • info@newjerseysolidarity.org

SUN FEB 25

6:30pm • \$6.50-10
FILM: SANTO DOMINGO BLUES
Documentary about Luis Vargas and bachata, the guitar blues of Santo Domingo.
Two Boots Pioneer Theater
155 East 3rd St.
212-591-0434 • twoboots.com

MON FEB 26

10pm • \$3
SHOW: THE O'DEBRIA TWINS "SHOW AND TELL"
Open mic and surprises until the wee hours.
Bowery Poetry Club,
308 Bowery at Bleecker
212-614-0505 • bowerypoetry.com

TUES FEB 27

7pm • \$3-5 suggested donation
WOMEN'S POETRY JAM AND WOMEN'S OPEN MIC. Featured writers: Joy Ladin and Joanne Pagano Weber; open mic begins at 7pm. Bluestockings Bookstore.
212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

WED FEB 28

7pm • \$5
WRITE FROM WRONG: Showcase of words by young people who have survived the prison-industrial complex and open mic.
Nuyorican Poets Cafe
236 East 3rd St.
212-505-8183 • nuyorican.org

7pm • \$5 suggested donation
FILM: IRAQ FOR SALE. Followed by discussion with members of the NYC Chapter of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.
Bluestockings Bookstore
172 Allen St.
212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

letters to the editor



READERS REFLECT ON ANTIWAR MOVEMENT

In response to last issue's analysis, "Escalating the Antiwar Movement: After four years of marching, Iraq War opponents look to ramp up resistance," (Feb. 1, 2007) many readers expressed their opinions on the state of the antiwar movement on indypendent.org.

THU MAR 1

5:30pm
GETTING TO KNOW THE UFT: AN INTRODUCTION FOR TEACHER ACTIVISTS
NYC public school teachers are invited to learn about and discuss the radical roots of the United Federation of Teachers.
Brecht Forum, 451 West St.
212-242-4201
brechtforum.org

6:30pm

CANDLELIGHT VIGIL FOR MALCOM FERGUSON, who was wrongfully killed by the NYPD in the Bronx on March 1, 2000.
1045 Boyton Ave., Bronx

FRI MAR 2

7pm • \$10 suggested donation
BENEFIT FOR THE PANTHER 8
With speakers and screening of "Legacy of Torture." All donation will go to the defense of the Panther 8.
Community Church
40 East 35th St.
cdhrsupport.org

SAT MAR 3

8pm • \$6-10-15 suggested donation, no one turned away
PERFORMANCE: FAWZIA AFZAL-KHAN WITH MUSTAFA SAMDANI
Talk interspersed with live performance, Indian Sufi song and video clips.
Brecht Forum
451 West St.
212-242-4201 • brechtforum.org

MON MAR 6

5:30-7pm • \$7
PERFORMANCE: URBANA POETRY SLAM! AND OPEN MIC.

Bowery Poetry Club,
308 Bowery at Bleecker
212-614-0505 • bowerypoetry.com

WED MAR 7

6:30pm • FREE
READING: EISA NEFERTARI ULEN, AUTHOR OF CRYSTELLE MOURNING. Followed by book signing. Part of the Women Writers of the Diaspora series.
The New School, 66 West 12th St.
212-229-5615
publicprograms@newschool.edu

THU MAR 8

7:30pm
EXHIBIT: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY WOMEN OF COLOR ART EXHIBIT
Brecht Forum

Launched in September 2000, *The Indypendent* will celebrate its 100th issue on March 14.

100 issues of the Indy

Relive 6 years of radical grassroots activism here in New York and around the world and find out how a startup paper with no money and an all-volunteer staff survived and thrived when the rest of the newspaper industry was collapsing around it.

Let us know what you think.

How can the Indy get better? What do you look for in the paper? What should we be covering more of? We'll be running reader responses.

→ P.O. Box 1417 NY, NY 10276

→ indypendent.org

→ imc-nyc-print@lists.indymedia.org

—MATT

Thanks for taking the initiative for writing this article, Jessica. I know it might not be popular, but damnit, it's gotta be said. Let's stick it to the war machine!

—PHALCON

Mass rallies are indispensable, and yet clearly inadequate, in helping end the war all by themselves. I wish groups like United for Peace & Justice (UFPJ) would take a serious look at their failure to organize the tens of thousands of their supporters who show up at these mass rallies into a regular activist force.

—JIMMYTRI

The Republicans and the majority of Democrats in Congress still serve their global corporate masters and the war machine. They are about money and power, not people. I highly doubt they will end the war until a massive wave of

outrage and protest fills the streets. The problem is the global capitalist system. Until that is done away with, war and poverty and injustice will continue.

—PHALCON

Jeezus H. Christ. Has it occurred to folks that the antiwar movement is simply not a bicoastal phenomenon? Antiwar organizing is going on in the Midwest, South, Southwest, Rocky Mountain states as well – much of it localized and relatively independent of UFPJ, ANSWER, World Can't Wait and Troops Out Now? This article simply reinforces the perception that antiwar activists and pundits clustered in NYC, DC and SF are out of touch with the rest of the country. Maybe it might be worthwhile to actually survey the plethora of IMC sites in those regions, and find out more.

—MARAT



GIRLBEATER: Assistant Police Chief Bruce Smolka manhandles a female cyclist at the April 29, 2005 Critical Mass bike ride. As he rose through the NYPD's ranks, Smolka gained notoriety for his tough tactics including a penchant for pummeling young women activists.

PHOTO: © ANTRIM CASKEY

Good Riddance

SMOLKA'S ILLUSTRIOS CAREER

Dec. 1980: Smolka joins the NYPD and quickly rises through the ranks.

Feb. 4, 1999: Smolka is the commanding officer of the Street Crimes Unit when four NYPD plainclothes officers gun down Amadou Diallo, an unarmed 23-year old immigrant, with 41 shots.

March 2002: Promoted to Deputy Chief.



Feb. 2003: Smolka responds to massive antiwar protests by illegally ordering horseback-mounted police to charge into crowds of peaceful demonstrators.

April 2003: Smolka orders 300 officers in full riot gear to confront nearly 100 demonstrators in front of the midtown headquarters of Carlyle Group.

May 5, 2003: Smolka is videotaped kneeing Cynthia Greenberg in the face during a non-violent immigration protest at 26 Federal Plaza in Manhattan. In his deposition last month, Smolka explained, "I was moving. She perhaps rocked and that is how her knee, my knee, came in contact with her head."

April 2004 – Feb. 2007: Smolka heads NYPD's Manhattan South command—the center of Critical Mass bike rides and Republican National Convention protests.

Aug. 2004: 1,800 arrested at Republican National Convention.

Feb. 2006: Adrienne Wheeler claims she was assaulted by Smolka during a Critical Mass rally when he yanked her off of her bicycle.

Jan. 2007: Facing a plethora of lawsuits for violating the civil rights of protesters, Smolka is grilled during depositions by lawyers. Soon after, he announces that he is retiring from the NYPD to take a lucrative job in private industry.

BY SAM ALCOFF

A scandal-prone NYPD assistant chief's abrupt retirement this month has many video activists wondering if they've helped topple a giant. Bruce Smolka, the Manhattan assistant chief responsible for carrying out the city's heavy-handed crackdown on protest, announced that he is leaving this month in the midst of several lawsuits and online videos of him roughing up protesters.

"The question is ripe," said I-Witness Video's Eileen Clancy, "he's a powerful chief who loves his job, but he knows the trials are coming up and that the videos are going to be seen more widely. Did we help usher him out?"

One of the more widely seen videos in question is from a 2003 action at the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) against both the war and the government's persecution of immigrants. Smolka can be seen toward the back with several other officers arresting a nonviolent Cynthia Greenberg. But after a moment of grabbing, Smolka clearly knees her in the face.

As Greenberg is escorted past the camera, she shares, "One of the officers just called me a cunt and kicked me in the face," before being hustled away. "He came over, cussed at me and screamed at me. After I fell over, he continued to cuss at me and kick me," Greenberg, now 37, told *The Indypendent*. "What was so shocking about it was the police knew about us in advance; we were peacefully sitting there, they had complete control and then this happens."

Smolka's notoriety is longstanding: He headed the NYPD's notorious Street Crimes Unit, whose members' shirts quoted Hemingway ("There is no hunting like the

NYPD ASSISTANT CHIEF BRUCE SMOLKA RETIRES ABRUPTLY AMIDST VIDEO-FUELED SCANDALS

hunting of man and those who have hunted armed men long enough and like it never care for anything else") and boasted of "owning the night." The unit was ordered to disband after members gunned down Amadou Diallo, an unarmed immigrant returning home, in a hail of 41 bullets. Smolka's punishment was a promotion. As the commanding officer in Southern Manhattan, he has since orchestrated that borough's harassment strategy against the monthly Critical Mass bike rides and was responsible for leading numerous arrests during the 2004 Republican National Convention.

Smolka, 54, is, or is about to be, listed in at least four lawsuits and has been captured on video in plainclothes and without identifying himself as a police officer, grabbing a bicyclist off her bike. "He has a history of bullying women," says the bicyclist, Adrienne Wheeler, who was serving as an observer for the National Lawyer's Guild, "but he's the perfect scapegoat. [Smolka's commanding officers] know who he is and what he does. Think of all the examples he set, the residue in all the police he led. Why would they want that?"

"One would hope that this sort of zero tolerance toward people who want to demonstrate, this absolute disregard for the First Amendment and civil rights, wouldn't be the kind of policing that [the police] would allow," says Jonathan Moore, a civil rights lawyer who has gone to court against Smolka several times. "But they know who he is. He's highly aggressive against people who aren't violent or resisting in any way. He's not an aberration or a rogue bad cop, he's there to set the tone for the officers under him. I'm happy to see him go, but we shouldn't think the situation will suddenly improve with him gone."

"Respect Life": Freed Prisoners Rap Death Penalty

BY ALI WINSTON

On Jan. 30, U.S. District Judge Nicholas Garaufis condemned Ronell Wilson to die for killing two undercover New York police officers in Staten Island during a 2003 sting operation. It was New York's first death sentence in more than 50 years – administered in a state in which less than a third of the population supports the death penalty, according to a Sept. 2006 *New York Times-CBS* poll.

The impact of Wilson's sentencing reverberated a week later at the National Black Theater in Harlem as four wrongfully convicted men spoke about their ordeals at a panel hosted by the Campaign to End the Death Penalty and New Yorkers against the Death Penalty. Jeffrey Deskovic, Lawrence Hayes, Alan Newton and Yusef Salaam were all exonerated of crimes ranging from robbery, to rape and murder. They spent between six and 21 years in prison, and Hayes passed two years of his life on death row.

"It's important for us to talk about the people that are innocent and wrongfully convicted, but it's also important for us to talk about the ones that are guilty," said Lee Wengraf, a board member of the Campaign to End the Death Penalty.

Wengraf excoriated the government for "making an example" of Wilson. The intervention of U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez was instrumental in moving Wilson's case from state to federal court in order to obtain a death sentence. (The New York Court of Appeals ruled that the death penalty violates the state's constitution.)

"Ronell is one of the many thousands of people who the government disinvested itself from – they said it was okay to strip the social investment from communities [like the Stapleton Houses, a Staten Island housing project where Wilson grew up], which creates conditions that foster crime," said Wengraf. "They want the Ronell Wilsons on death row so they can say, 'They're the worst of the worst, they're the ones causing problems.'"

Lawrence Hayes, a former Black Panther who was wrongfully convicted of killing a police officer



Alan Newton, exonerated prisoner

in 1970, spent two years on death row in New York. Paroled in 1991, Hayes spoke passionately about the harm America's fixation with the death penalty wreaks at home and abroad.

"This country is holding humanity back from that next step, which is to appreciate, value and respect life. And we right here have an opportunity to change that."

Yusef Salaam is living proof of how public hysteria and overzealous authorities pervert the U.S.'s criminal justice system. Convicted at the age of 15 of rape and assault in the infamous Central Park jogger case, Salaam was exonerated in 2002 when a serial rapist already behind bars confessed to the crime. Throughout the trial, real estate tycoon Donald Trump took out advertisements in the major New York papers advocating the death penalty for Salaam and his co-defendants.

In the last two-and-a-half years, ten prisoners sentenced to lengthy prison terms in New York state have been found innocent after reviews of evidence in their cases. Jeffrey Deskovic and Alan Newton were both released last year after the DNA evidence in their case was re-examined at the insistence of the Innocence Project, a litigation organization dedicated to reforming the criminal justice system.

SINGING FOR PEACE

Rapper Son of Nun performs at a fundraiser for Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) on Feb. 18 at Rocky Sullivan's Bar in Manhattan. IVAW has called for the immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq, reparations for the people of Iraq and full health benefits for U.S. veterans.

PHOTO: DENNIS HO



hands off my money

Taking the Tax Out of Tax Prep

BY MARY HEGLAR

Every year, low-income New Yorkers lose millions of dollars to predatory tax-refund preparation and loan companies. Loan fees and preparation costs, charged by some of the nation's leading accounting firms stripped nearly \$60 million dollars from low-income New Yorkers' tax refund checks in 2005.

At the Lower East Side People's Federal Credit Union (LESPFCU), however, the lobby is packed with successful filers leaving with their tax burden lifted. This is just one of dozens of community organizations in the city that offer free tax preparation (see sidebar for a partial list).

"These people are nice. The difference is they are not taking money, [the other firms] are taking money," said Hosna A. Begum, a 58-year-old Bangladesh native and second-year participant. Begum is a professional nurse, but needs a license to practice in the United States, so she works as a cashier at Duane Reade. She will put the money she saves by using this service, which she estimates to be between \$100 and \$200, into a savings account for her 19-year-old daughter's college education.

The credit union has provided this Internal Revenue Service (IRS)-approved service for five years now. To qualify, single filers must have a maximum annual income of \$20,000 or \$40,000 for households of more than one person. There are no residency requirements. The credit union opens accounts for filers immediately, free of charge, so that they can opt to receive their refunds through direct deposit. The credit union also provides an alternative to the more standard refund anticipation loan provided by larger tax agencies and waits until the refund is approved, to assure that the amount lent equals the refund.

"It's less predatory," says Megan Van Harte, director of development for LESPFCU.

Julio Slavik, a former employee of New York City Parks and Recreation, is here for the third year in a row. "The service is simple and not time consuming... and [the union] has a community feel." He holds an account here, a relationship that started

when he heard about the tax service through his mother.

According to Van Harte, each filer with the union "is saving about \$150, and that's a conservative estimate." Last year, the union filed for 1,085 participants. That means the LESPFCU rerouted at least \$162,750 back to the earners.

Sessions are staffed by credit union employees, volunteers and some workers compensated through stipends. "The employees are valuable and we need them, but we love our volunteers," says Van Harte. "They have so much passion. They're just as critical as the paid staff."

Cherise Washington, who is an employee of the LESPFCU, has worked in tax preparation for seven years and is a former employee of Jackson Hewitt. "When people realize how much they have to pay [at Jackson Hewitt], they don't want to," says Washington.

"People are more friendly [here] because they don't have to pay," said Washington.

"It's the same service, just here you're not getting ripped off," said Jennifer Stella, a 27-year-old receptionist from Queens who used to have her taxes prepared by H&R Block.

Participation has grown steadily each year as people return and spread the word. "I give people the address and tell them to come here," says Begum. "The people are nice and you get the same money."

WHERE TO GET FREE TAX HELP

Lower East Side People's Federal Credit Union
37 Avenue B or 80 Pitt St., at Rivington St.

Harlem: By appointment only

FREE TAX PREPARATION SITES

BROOKLYN

- Bed-Stuy. Restoration
- Warburg Lutheran Home for the Aged
- Flatbush Dutch Reform Church
- Bushwick Cooperative Credit Union
- Make the Road by Walking, sponsored by Bushwick Cooperative Credit Union
- ACORN

BRONX

- 1199 SEIU Training Center
- South Bronx Action Group
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Bronx IRS Taxpayer Assistance Center
- ARIVA Tax Assistance Center
- Davidson Community Center

MANHATTAN

- Northern Manhattan Improvement Corp.
- Goddard-Riverside Community Center
- Harlem Congregations for Community Improvement
- Housing Conservation Coordinator
- Harlem IRS Taxpayer Assistance Center
- Washington Heights-Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation

QUEENS

- First Presbyterian Church
- Office of Assemblyman Jeff Aubrey
- IRS Taxpayer Assistance Center

STATEN ISLAND

- SI Bank & Trust

For more information on free tax preparation in New York City, visit the Neighborhood Economic Development Advocacy Project at www.nedap.org.

Julio Slavik who had his taxes prepared at the LESPFCU this year, waits to be called back for a final review of his forms. PHOTO: ANTRIM CASKEY



A PLEDGE TO AID NEW ORLEANS

New York students do their part to help New Orleans residents rebuild their communities. Banneker Academy is hoping to raise \$5,000 in February to honor Black History Month. PHOTO: JEFFREY BUCHANAN

BY JEFFREY BUCHANAN

For students at the Benjamin Banneker Academy for Community Development in Brooklyn, Black History Month will be a chance not only to study examples of civil rights activism, but also to put these lessons into action.

"Black History Month celebrates the Black leaders whose struggles and sacrifices gave us the rights and freedoms we cherish today," said La-Keisha Towner, a senior at Banneker Academy. "We want to honor their courage by raising money for Katrina survivors struggling to realize their human rights to return and rebuild their communities."

Banneker Academy students have pledged to raise \$5,000 in February for the grassroots social justice group, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) New Orleans, and are also planning on traveling to the region for their spring break to aid ACORN in cleaning up and rebuilding family homes and working class neighborhoods.

The students are also issuing a challenge for one thousand other schools, groups, churches, philanthropists or businesses to step forward and launch their own campaigns to raise a \$5,000 matching donation to help ACORN New Orleans toward a goal of raising \$5,000,000.

"By raising these funds and going down to New Orleans we can not only repair homes but the culture. During Black History Month we remember the legacy that our ancestors have left us; New Orleans is a part of that legacy," said Banneker junior Beatriz Grullon.

The students kicked off their fundraising effort on Feb. 1, the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s first speech in New Orleans, with the goal of helping more Americans to realize their responsibility to support the storm's survivors in rebuilding their lives and communities.

Led by their teacher, Terry Ann Samuel, who volunteered with ACORN New Orleans for six weeks and brought the groups' work to her students' attention, the students have begun selling items at their school store, selling Krispy Kreme Doughnuts and snacks during lunch periods, and taking up donations from the community.

"It is easy for people to look at a problem situation and say, 'That's a shame.' It is quite another to do something about it and

provide realistic, meaningful ways of becoming change agents," said Samuel. "We work with the understanding that every little bit helps; that one is the difference between 99 and 100. This fundraiser is our school's 'little bit,' and we hope, sincerely, that others will join us."

In New Orleans, thousands of homes still lie in shambles almost a year and a half after the storm, especially in working-class neighborhoods like the Lower Ninth Ward, where many still displaced ACORN members once lived. Federal assistance for rebuilding homes has only reached a handful of families. ACORN has gutted and preserved almost 2,000 storm-damaged homes free of charge, more than any group in the area, with the help of volunteer labor. Gutting is required by city ordinances as a condition for residents to return to their homes, which might otherwise be seized as "blighted properties." ACORN continues to mount legal challenges to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) policies and lobby the federal, state and local governments to protect working-class families, many of whom are still displaced. In the midst of this tragedy, numerous community-based organizations have risen to the challenge to tackle problems of housing, jobs and informing those still displaced of their rights.

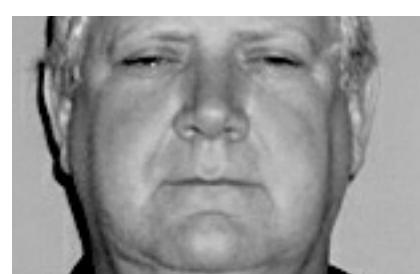
"How the government treated the victims of the storm generated a lot of emotion out of the Black community," said Stephen Bradberry, ACORN Louisiana's head organizer. "But now a year and a half later we need to put some of that emotion into action." Bradberry is coordinating the Banneker fundraising effort.

"President Bush and other leaders might not make good on their promises to rebuild New Orleans, but together if we can build on the efforts of these kids, bring together a thousand or so groups and raise these funds," he said, "then together as a community we can still make good on these promises and heal these neighborhoods and the wound this tragedy has left open in our country."

"No one can help us but ourselves," said Banneker Academy 11th grader Darian Springer. "We are the future. It's up to us to try the hardest to make it better."

To find out more, contact donor@acorn.org
neworleans.acorn.org/blackhistory/project
ACORN New Orleans at 1-800-790-2290.

LONGSHORE BIGS BICKER OVER BROKEN BENEFITS



Clockwise from top left: John Bowers, George Barrone, Al Cernadas, and Harold Daggett

BY BENNETT BAUMER

Since beating a labor racketeering rap two years ago, top officials with the troubled International Longshoremen Association (ILA) could now be jockeying for the power to lead the East Coast Union. An unsigned flier circulating throughout the New York/New Jersey ports over the past couple weeks is calling for a "Walk in Solidarity" to protest cuts in health benefits and poor financial management.

The flier comes just months before a potential shift of power in the government-supervised Bayonne, New Jersey Local 1588. Progressive union militants are gearing to win an election and wrest power from decades of corrupt leadership in the port

early this spring. The federal government has had a trusteeship over the Bayonne local since January 2003.

"Nothing happened," said ILA spokesperson Jim McNamara in reference to the job action. "If it [flier] wasn't signed, I wouldn't put much credence in it."

The cryptic flier lambasted the federal government's "attacks" and blamed long-time ILA President John Bowers and Secretary Treasurer Robert Gleason for deteriorating health benefits. Apart from criticizing the government and international president, the flier is curious because it lauds former Newark Local 1235 President Al Cernadas and current General Organizer Harold Daggett, who both formerly sat on the union's health benefits fund. In 2005, Cernadas resigned his post in disgrace

and admitted to labor racketeering and other fraud. In the 2005 federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) complaint against the international union, the government claims the Genovese crime family picked Daggett to lead the union once Bowers retired.

The union's health benefits fund has been on shaky financial ground as many rank and file members have had problems obtaining proper coverage and hundreds of doctors have dropped out of the plan. Open criticism of union officials is rare in the ILA, a union with a long organized crime affiliation. Labor militants who speak out too loudly risk anything from the loss of job hours to physical violence by enforcers in New York's powerful Cosa Nostra families.

The octogenarian ILA president, John Bowers has made no formal announcement of his retirement from the union. However, his departure is anticipated sometime soon, which will create a power vacuum. Executive Vice President Richard Hughes seems an obvious choice to succeed Bowers though delegates representing each port local elect the international president. The candidate who shores up the delegates will win the power of the presidency.

In 2005 the federal government filed a RICO case against ILA General Organizer Harold Daggett and a vice president, Arthur Coffey on labor racketeering and other fraud. Both were acquitted of the charges, dealing a blow to the government's attempt to take over the union. Coffey then broke ranks with the international union as he squabbled over the union refusing to pay his legal fees. A third defendant in the case was Larry Ricci, a reputed Cosa Nostra capo in the Genovese crime family, who became absent half way through the trial. Police later found Ricci's body in the trunk of a silver Acura parked at a Jersey diner.

Anchors on the Port

JOHN BOWERS

As president of one of the smallest unions in the AFL-CIO, John Bowers is the third highest paid labor official in the country. Bowers earns \$590,194 each year, according to *Labor Notes*. Bowers is an alleged associate of the Genovese crime family. During a union business trip in Miami, Bowers was told by Capo George Barone that Harold Daggett was the Genovese family's choice to succeed Bowers as president. "I am alone: one-on-one. I know of his reputation. I am not going to ask a lot of questions. I am figuring now how the hell to get out of the place," Bowers told the feds.

HAROLD DAGGETT

The general organizer of the ILA union, Daggett was tried in the Brooklyn federal court, along with Arthur Coffey and Lawrence Ricci – for involvement in an eight-year scheme to divert hundreds of thousands of dollars from ILA workers' health and welfare funds to the Genovese crime family. During the 2005 trial Daggett testified that former Genovese Capo George Barone held a gun to his head in the back of an East Harlem grocery store to keep Daggett in line. "I was so nervous I urinated all over myself," said Daggett. He was eventually acquitted on all charges.

AL CERNADAS

The former president of Newark Local 1235 oversaw his local's 2004 master contract vote at the Newark Airport Holiday Inn. When union members came to witness the vote count, Cernadas cussed them out, refused to reveal the vote tally and then led the team of election "monitors" with ballot boxes in tow to the Holiday Inn bar. Cernadas later pled guilty to fraud and conspiracy charges in the 2005 racketeering suit – the only ILA official to be convicted in the case.

Fighting for Minimum Wage Rights

BY CLARK MERREFIELD

For many of the Latino and East Asian warehouse workers in North Brooklyn and Queens who keep the shelves and kitchens of New York City restaurants, grocery stores and delis stocked, getting by is a constant struggle. Customers are often culturally and economically removed from the warehouses' largely immigrant workforce, while the management can be downright exploitative.

Top City Produce, a warehouse in Bushwick, has faced accusations of unfair labor practice from its employees and their representative union, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Management at two other IWW-represented warehouses, Handyfat Trading Inc. (Bushwick) and EZ Supply Corp., now Sunrise Plus Corp., (Queens) have fired all their unionized workers in the past month and a half.

On Feb. 3, Top City workers were told in a letter from management that Top City would be closing for three weeks to financially restructure.

Then, on Feb. 13, union organizers were told that Top City's lawyer was willing to talk. The two sides agreed that workers would return the next day, but without the

\$30 lunch stipend they had enjoyed and also without the right to change their clothes at the workplace. Though the workers are happy to be returning to their jobs, Top City's perceived slights have not gone unnoticed.

"Every day they're doing things to take rights away," said IWW member Osvaldo Garcia, who has been working at Top City for five years.

"The lawyer says they're willing to accept the union and negotiate a shop contract, and the employer turns around and retaliates against the workers," said Billy Randel, lead organizer for the Top City campaign.

When asked about his decision to shut down his warehouse on Feb. 3, Top City owner Tony Chen said, "I have nothing to say about it."

Complaints against Top City have already been filed with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), and decisions on those complaints are expected shortly. The IWW intends to file new charges with the NLRB based on the company's recent shutdown.

According to Randel, the IWW raised \$20,000 to help sustain Top City's unionized workers during the shutdown period. The IWW employed the unionized work-

ers as warehouse organizers in Chinatown and Bushwick before Top City's unexpected callback.

Garcia said before joining the IWW, he was making \$480 per week working ten-and-a-half to eleven-and-a-half hours per day, six days a week. Now, he is making minimum wage – \$7.15 per hour in New York state – and working 30 to 35 hours per week. According to IWW organizer Tomer Malchi, Garcia and other workers would like more hours.

"That's still not enough. They want to be working more, they want overtime. That's where the money is," Malchi said.

Though six of 11 Top City workers are reportedly staunchly against the union, the five who have signed up are just as staunchly in favor of it.

"I've been listening to what other people are saying and they don't think that the union is good, but I know that they're helping me and they're helping us in this situation," Garcia said.

MAKE THE BOSS PAY

Is your employer cheating you out of wages you are legally owed? The State Labor Department has bilingual investigators throughout the state who are able to aid workers with issues relating to compliance with New York's labor laws.

- New York State minimum wage: \$7.15/hour
- To file a complaint or ask questions call 1-800-447-3992 from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday - Friday. Operators speak English and Spanish.
- If you speak Chinese, you may call 212-621-0475 and if you speak Korean, you may call 212-621-0483.
- For more information: www.labor.state.ny.us

Independent Journalist Still Behind Bars

Upholding freedom of press principles landed Josh Wolf behind bars. Wolf, a 24-year old freelance journalist and independent videographer, is currently in "coercive custody" at the Federal Detention Facility in Dublin, Calif. for resisting a subpoena to testify before a Federal Grand jury and for refusing to release video footage from a San Francisco anti-G8 Summit protest in July 2005. On Feb. 6, Wolf became the longest imprisoned journalist in U.S. history for his refusal to comply based on journalistic principles. As of Feb. 21, Wolf has been imprisoned for 183 days.

"Many have asked me why I've chosen to sacrifice my personal freedom," wrote Wolf in his blog from prison Feb. 6. "Most pressing is the fact that a free press in a democracy cannot act as an extension of the justice department."

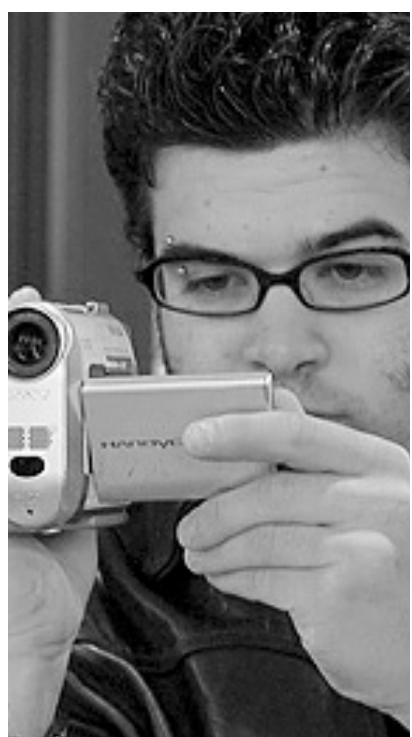
Wolf, who has been covering protests in San Francisco for more than two years, posted a video of the 2005 protest to his website and sold some of the footage to the local nightly news stations. Local and federal law enforcement agents, who were investigating clashes between police and demonstrators, tuned into Wolf's video and soon served him a federal subpoena demanding him to release copies of his unpublished video footage and to testify about the protesters seen on the tape.

Wolf has stated several times under oath that his unpublished material does not show video footage of any of the alleged crimes committed. "This case is not about a videotape and it's not about justice. This entire matter is about eroding the rights of privacy and those of a free press," Wolf wrote. "It is about identifying civil dissidents and using members of the news media to actively assist in what is essentially an anarchist witch hunt."

Many in the news media community have publicly issued statements supporting Wolf in the last year, and he was awarded the 2006 Society of Professional Journalists Freedom of Information Award as Journalist of the Year.

"The role of the media is to ask the questions, to point at those inconsistencies, and to demand answers from the powers that be," wrote Wolf. "This is why the media is under attack and this is why it is so urgent that we continue to fight back. Because without a free press we can never be free." —J.L.

For more information on Josh Wolf or to see the video he published about the 2005 protest: www.joshwolf.net



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LEO GARCIA

U.S. Military Research Creeps into The New School

AT A SCHOOL WITH A PACIFIST HISTORY, STUDENTS RAISE CONCERN ABOUT A DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE GRANT

BY JESSICA LEE

Imagine a search engine vastly more powerful than Google that could display the results as an interactive map in real-time. A \$6 million Department of Defense (DOD) grant was awarded to the Parsons Institute for Information Mapping (PIIM), a research institute at The New School, to develop such a computer program to aid homeland security efforts at home and abroad.

Students are troubled by the relationship forming between the Pentagon and The New School, an institution founded in 1919 by pacifists and progressives.

"The student body is concerned because a semi-autonomous department bearing the university's name, and under the university's flag, is doing business with the agency of American imperialism in a historically liberal institution and refusing to be accountable to that university's students," said Alex Cline, a New School student and member of the school's Students for a Democratic Society chapter.

The 2006 fiscal year funding supports a partnership between The New School and DOD's National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency to develop and implement the Geospace and Media Tool (GMT), a complex search engine program with artificial intelligence capabilities that can rapidly search open data sources and then present the information geographically, in real-time. The technology would enable intelligence and law enforcement officials to sift through large amounts of data and news sources to map "hotspots of activity," such as political groups, as a way to deploy resources more effectively.

CEASE & DESIST DEMANDED

In protest, Cline and four other students presented a "search warrant" to PIIM Feb. 9. PIIM employees allowed the students to walk through the office and take pictures. The students also issued an order for PIIM to "cease and desist from all work on projects commissioned by military entities and end cooperation with other military contractors until such projects have been approved by a joint commission of students and faculty." The demands were backed by the Parsons Student Government, among other student groups.

"I think [the students] would have a legitimate concern if we were building bombs," said William Bevington, PIIM executive director, who was not present the day of the protest. "We are very proud of what we do. Their concern is that we would be using the money for military development, and that's not the case." Bevington noted that currently half of the work being done at PIIM is for the DOD. The PIIM website lists partners that include Raytheon Co., the fifth largest military contractor in the world and responsible for developing missiles, aircraft and knowledge-based computer programs for the Defense Intelligence Agency.

Bob Kerrey, President of The New School and founder of PIIM, has a long history of involvement in military affairs. He became interested in geography while in the U.S. Navy, and as a U.S. senator and vice chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, was responsible for the development of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, whose primary function is collecting, analyzing and distributing intelligence and maps in support of national security. Since coming

to The New School in 2001, Kerrey has been a keynote speaker at a variety of intelligence and private sector seminars.

According to the PIIM website, Kerrey "set out to find new ways to bring The New School's substantial intellectual resources to bear on real-world problems in a more immediate way."

"I watched our military use, analyze, enhance and distribute these new [GMT] images in order to prepare our war fighters for battle and to help our peacemakers avoid the battle in the first place," Kerrey said last August at the 26th Annual International User Conference held by ESRI, a leading global information system company.

With the increasing military budget under the Bush Administration, universities receiving DOD grants is old news. However, students were shocked to learn the progressive New School was leaping into the military-industrial-academic complex.

MILITARIZING RESEARCH

Since World War II, more educational institutions have become engaged in developing war technology. The DOD awarded \$91 million to support "academic research" in 1958, a minuscule amount compared to the \$66 billion allocated for "research and development" in 2004.

"There is not a lot of money for anything anymore, with a military budget of \$500 billion," said Frida Berrigan, senior research associate at the Arms Trade Resource Center of The New School's World Policy Institute. "Where else are public or private institutions going to get funds from? It is forcing people to make militarized arguments for what research they are doing."

"Throughout history, the argument has been made that advances in warfare technology would produce peace," explained Marie Skoczyllas, an activist organizing against war robotics research at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. "And yet inventions such as the cannon, the rifle, the nuclear bomb – none of them has led to long-term peace or security."

The New School grant was part of \$11.5 million DOD dollars awarded to New York City institutions, including Columbia University Medical Center/Mailman School of Public Health Northeast Biodefense Center Completion Project, New York Structural Biology Center, New York University's Center for Catastrophe Preparedness and Response and Consortium on Preparedness and the American Museum of Natural History's Institute for Comparative Genomics.

"As the men and women of our military bravely serve our country all over the world, the funding for these New York City defense projects will vastly improve national security technology and will give our armed forces an even greater edge," said Senator Charles Schumer Dec. 19, 2005, the day the grants were announced.

Amy Wolf and Leija Hanrahan contributed to this article.

Confronting the "Military-Industrial-Academic Complex"

Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) ranks high on the list of academic institutions that receive military research and development contracts, a fiscal alliance that has made CMU a world leader in software guidance systems, communication networking systems, and most recently, warfare robotics. According to the website Fedspending.org, CMU received more than \$83 million in Department of Defense (DOD) contracts in 2005.

Local antiwar activists say it is time to confront the increasing military funding of academic research.

"The relationship between CMU and the DOD highlights an increasing militarization of academia. With the vast majority of funding for research in the sciences coming from the DOD and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, academics are essentially forced to work on weapons systems in order to get funding for research," Marie Skoczyllas, an activist with the Pittsburgh Organizing Group (POG) wrote in an email. "This situation creates a dangerous cycle in which students are trained for, and funneled into, those same weapons systems

programs. Students and faculty are knowing, and often unknowing, cogs in an expanding and terrifying war machine."

The National Robotics Engineering Center (NREC) at CMU has already developed a wide range of war robotic technologies, including an artificial intelligence reconnaissance robot that is being utilized in Iraq.

Pittsburgh peace activists are planning to shut down NREC on March 2. A recent POG press release states, "Let's bring antiwar resistance to the center of the public's attention and shut down a local player in the war machine.

Attempting to shut down NREC will be a nonviolent direct action against the Iraq war as well as a symbolic statement on the increasing degree to which people are prepared to resist endless U.S. wars for empire."

After years of aggressive counter-recruiting efforts and protests, POG decided it was time to ramp up the resistance. "We felt like we could do more than marching in the street and actually confront manifestations of the war in our own backyard," explained Skoczyllas.—J.L.

For more information about POG: organizepittsburgh.org.



Corn is not just nutrition and livelihood for the peoples of Mexico and Central America. It is also culture and religion. PHOTO: JAMES RODRIGUEZ

BY JOHN ROSS

MEXICO CITY—The *diableros* (hand truck hustlers) from Lagunilla market who were clustered around La Lupita's Ricos Tacos in the rough-and-tumble barrio of Tepito were not smiling. "Yesterday these cost me six pesos. Today, it's eight. Tomorrow, who knows, ten?" complained Rodrigo Aldama, 28, pointing at the three greasy tacos on his paper plate. "Vitamin T is rich man's food now," he adds. Vitamin T, a staple of urban diet here, includes tacos, tostadas, tamales, tortillas, and most any kind of street food concocted from corn.

The steep jump of tortilla prices in January to as high as 18 pesos a kilo from six in November has unleashed a storm of protest and suspicion. "Someone's getting rich on my 'ricos tacos,' but it isn't me," lamented Lupita Perez. Many point fingers at the corn distribution system, which is run by transnational corporations.

Rodrigo had another theory. "The tortilla is Mexico, but now they want us to eat white bread like the gringos," he said. Others see even more sinister motives behind the sudden spike in tortilla prices, which the government of President Felipe Calderón blames on short supply and high prices for white and yellow corn—the opening of the Mexican milpa or corn patch to genetically modified (GM) corn.

NAFTA DEVASTATES MEXICAN CORN BUSINESS

World corn prices are currently at an all-time high due to burgeoning interest in ethanol production as a petroleum substitute. Although Mexico is a major oil producer, the price of corn has been pushed upward by the cost of diesel and petrochemical fertilizers and pesticides. Crop failures due to drought, flooding, and even ice storms have contributed to the price surge. Whatever the immediate causes, the dismantling of government agricultural programs and the brutal impacts of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have deepened the crisis in Mexican corn production.

Competition with highly subsidized U.S. farmers is driving their Mexican counterparts into bankruptcy. Whereas south of the border, guaranteed prices for farmers' crops are a thing of the past, corporate corn growers north of the Rio Bravo can receive up to \$21,000 an acre in subsidies from the U.S. government, enabling them to dump their corn over the border at 80 percent of cost. The impact of this inundation has been to force six million farmers and their families here to abandon their plots and

leap into the migration stream, according to a 2004 Carnegie Endowment study.

This assault on poor farmers will be exacerbated at the end of 2007 when all tariffs on U.S. corn are abolished. Meanwhile, President Calderón seeks to tamp down tortilla prices by importing up to two million duty-free tons to augment what Mexican farmers can or cannot produce. Such a solution is guaranteed to drive more farmers off the land. Even worse is that much of the new influx of NAFTA corn will be transgenic.

GENETICALLY-MODIFIED CORN CROSSES BORDERS

A great deal of the 36 million tons of corn Mexico has imported from the United States in the past six years is genetically modified—40 to 60 percent—estimates the environmental group Greenpeace. For U.S. producers, barred from selling GM corn in Europe and Japan, Mexico is a dumping ground for the grain.

Although Mexico imports millions of tons of transgenic corn, it remains a crime to plant genetically modified seed. In 1998, the National Biosecurity Commission, an interdisciplinary body that involves the health and agricultural secretariats, declared a moratorium on planting genetically modified corn until its impact could be determined. The ban remains in place although under heavy attack from big biotech and agribusiness and transnational grain purveyors, like the Cargill Corporation, which now controls much of Mexican corn distribution.

Despite the prohibitions on planting, there is plenty of transgenic corn tassling up in the Mexican milpas these days. Some of it is accidental. Massive import of NAFTA corn distributed in rural regions through state-owned Diconsa warehouses threaten vast swathes of the Mexican *campo*. Diconsa trucks are old and the roads rough and the GM corn blows off into the wind contaminating cornfields for miles around.

Despite the prohibitions, big corn growers have been sowing transgenic maize without government permission for years. Roberto Gonzalez Barrera, *El Rey de la Tortilla*, whose Maseca-Gruma, now one third owned by the Archer Daniels Midlands conglomerate, rules between 60 and 80 percent of the corn flour and tortilla market. He once boasted that he had thousands of hectares under transgenic corn.

Maseca-Gruma is indeed a major player in the "transgenization" of the tortilla industry. During the administration of the now-reviled Carlos Salinas (1988-94), Gonzalez Barrera began marketing an instant corn flour mix milled from both genetically modified and natural corn. Taco

The Plot Against Mexican Maíz

BIG BIOTECH TAKES ADVANTAGE OF CORN CRISIS TO FORCE FARMERS TO BUY GM SEEDS

shells milled and concocted by Gruma and marketed by Kraft were found to contain Starlink (the Novartis brand) corn, then not yet authorized for human consumption. The Starlink corn resulted in the largest call-back of any transgenically contaminated product in U.S. history.

The Maseca mix has largely supplanted the traditional Indian way of preparing corn for tortillas—in which the kernels are put to soak overnight in a brew whose main ingredient is quicklime. As payback for market domination, the King of the Tortillas flew Salinas into self-exile in his private jet in 1995 after the ex-president's brother was arrested for murder.

U.S. COMPANIES MONOPOLIZE CORN

Barrera and his ADM partners and their transnational associates at Cargill-Consolidated Mexico and Mimsa-Corn Products now control the Mexican maize market. When ex-President Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) closed down CONASUPO, the state grain distribution system in 1997, the transnationals moved in and took control, said Luis Hernandez Navarro, op-ed editor at *La Jornada*, the national left daily, and a writer intimately familiar with agricultural issues. "When Mexican corn is in danger, so is Mexico," he cautions, echoing the old refrain "no hay pais sin maíz"—there is no country without corn.

Hernandez and other veteran observers of the Mexican *campo* strongly suspect that the current corn crisis is being manipulated to end the moratorium on planting transgenic corn in Mexico. "The transnationals want to end the moratorium and are using this made-up crisis to pressure the SAGARPA [Agricultural Secretariat] to do away with it," said Antonio Serratos, an investigator at the prestigious College of Mexico think tank. "It is part of their strategy for taking control of the entire agricultural sector."

As if to confirm Serratos' hunch, Big Agro is already petitioning the Biosecurity Commission to permit widespread planting in 2007. "Bio-tech is the only solution to growing more corn and keeping the tortilla affordable," advises Jaime Yesaki, director of the National Agriculture and Livestock Council (CNA), the principal agri-business federation in the country.

The CNA was joined in its petition to the secretary of agriculture to vacate the ban on growing GM corn by the National Association of Supermarkets and Retail Stores, which is controlled by the U.S. transnational Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart is now Mexico's number one retailer of tortillas and other foodstuffs and, with 700 megastores, the nation's largest employer.

The subtext of the corn conflict is control of the seed market. "We have been patiently waiting to end the moratorium for ten years now," complained Eduardo Perez Pico, director of Monsanto-Mexico, the St. Louis-based conglomerate that dominates world seed markets. "Meanwhile Mexico is falling behind the rest of the world in applying new seed technologies that can better feed its people," the magnate recently told the Mexican newspaper, *La Jornada*.

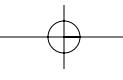
The Mexican geography produces hundreds of varieties of corn that have adapted to the country's myriad bioregions over millennia. The introduction of transgenic seed will work to homogenize these strains, according to Dr. Ignacio Chapela, the University of California-Berkeley biologist who was the first to locate GM contamination here while doing fieldwork in the tiny Oaxaca Sierra town of Calpulapan in 2001. "Millions of years of biological history will be lost if transgenic seeds are allowed to be planted in the Mexican milpa," Chapela affirms.

COLONIZATION AND CORN

Corn is not just nutrition and livelihood in Mexico, it is also culture and religion. Maíz came from the gods and the Aztecs and Mayas nourished those gods with sacrificial victims to keep it coming. The transnational attack on corn stirs passions and paranoias among the descendants of Mexico's first peoples. At a meeting of NAFTA scientists charged with investigating allegations brought by 17 Mexican NGOs that GM corn was a threat to the nation's 57 distinct indigenous peoples, an Indian farmer from Oaxaca seized the mic and accused the scientists, some with deep ties to big biotech, of practicing genocide by pushing transgenics. "First you killed your own Indians and now you want to kill us!" the farmer shouted angrily.

The Zapatistas are Mayans, and the Mayans are the People of the Corn. According to their sacred texts, they are actually made from maíz. Manuel, a member of the ecology-agricultural commission at Oventik, venerates these roots. "We are the corn—if it is poisoned so are we," he insisted during this New Year's gathering of the Zapatistas and their supporters from around the world. Now the Zapatistas are freezing their seed corn to preserve pure Mayan germ plasma so that there will never be a world without it.

John Ross is currently on the road with his latest work Zapatistas! Making Another World Possible—Chronicles of Resistance 2000-2006. This article originally appeared on *counterpunch.org*.



“They took my home.”

Guatemalan Villages Face Globalization at Gunpoint

PHOTOS BY JAMES RODRIGUEZ

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

When a convoy of 800 Guatemalan police and soldiers rolled into the tiny villages of La Unión and Barrio La Revolución on Jan. 8-9, it was globalization at gunpoint. The village was sitting atop a large nickel deposit. For the Maya Q'eqchi' residents, the land was their physical and spiritual home and the source of their livelihood. For Skye Resources, a Canadian mining firm, the villages and their people were obstacles to be removed as the company raced to take advantage of soaring metals prices.

Independent photojournalist James Rodriguez chronicled the confrontations that followed over the next two days. No one was killed or injured but scores of desperately poor subsistence farmers lost what little they had. For Skye, whose stock price has climbed more than 600 percent in the past year, it was one step closer to reopening a giant, open-pit mining project it hopes will produce more than 48 million lbs. per year of a metal widely used in stainless steel, magnets, coinage and special alloys.

Canadian mining interests have faced resistance from the people of northeastern Guatemala since they were first awarded this concession in 1965 by the country's then-military dictators. And they may yet have more trouble on their hands. "They think we're dumb but we'll see," said one woman in La Unión. "Just like the company kicked us out of our homes, we're going to kick the company out of our land."

For more photos by James Rodriguez, see minumundo.org. For more about Skye Resources and their mining operations in Guatemala, see rightsaction.org.



THE OLD GREY LADY AIN'T WHAT SHE USED TO BE

Who cares what *The New York Times* has to say? Fewer people, probably, than ever, but still enough reporters, editors and government officials to make its coverage – especially of international affairs – an important journalistic voice in a decision whether or not to go to war.

For at least two decades, the *Times* has been the newspaper that has set the agenda for the rest of the major media outlets. Not only do many newspapers without a large staff of foreign correspondents often run dispatches from the *Times* wire services, but network and cable news programs often go to the *Times* when they need to decide what their lead stories will be for the evening. Listen to it enough, and one realizes that even a radical news show like Amy Goodman's *Democracy Now!* often defines itself in relation to the *Times* – in opposition to the *Times* to be sure, but still, in large part, in dialogue with it.

Journalism professor Paul Janensch argued in 2004, "The *Times* is not just another newspaper. It is devoured every morning by opinion leaders in New York, Washington and around the country. Virtually every important news operation in the country – in the world, for that matter – is influenced by what the *Times* puts on page one."

In 2002, when the *Times* chose to hype stories about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and "smoking guns as mushroom clouds," that was a green light for the rest of the media to follow suit. The *Times*' alleged liberalism, ironically, often aids the pro-war crowd. If the liberal *Times* says Saddam Hussein (or Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, for that matter) is trying to build a nuclear bomb, well, then, it must be true. After all, it isn't as if *Fox News* is saying it.

Are newer media technologies, weblogs and so called "citizens' journalism," along with the erosion of institutional trust in the *Times* – occasioned by the Jason Blair and Judith Miller scandals – changing the news flow dynamic? Yes, in part, but the transition is a slow one.

What's more, bloggers still report only a fraction of the "actual news" that is the lifeblood of the *Times*' agenda setting power. Bloggers continue to be commentators on the news rather than reporters of it. As John Nichols recently argued in *The Nation*, "Newspapers may be the dinosaurs of America's new media age ... but the dinosaurs still have enough life in them to guide – and perhaps even define – our politics."

—C.A.

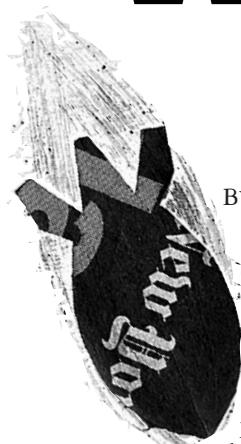
Radio Station Drops Unnamed Sources

BY JESSICA LEE

As stories about the "threat of Iran" blanket the mainstream media, unnamed government sources have been silenced by a small public radio station in Santa Fe, N.M. In an unprecedented media move, KSFR news director Bill Dupuy recently issued a memo to staff stating that the new policy of KSFR's news department is "to ignore and not repeat any wire service or nationally published story about Iran, China, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia or any other foreign power that quotes an 'unnamed' U.S. official."

Citing news agencies that published anonymous government sources to support the cause

Words of Mass



BY CHRIS ANDERSON

Whatever its end goal, the Bush administration is utilizing the same tactics, accusations and propaganda in preparing the American public for a possible attack on Iran as it did during the lead-up to the bombardment, invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2002-2003. Whether these tactics will succeed a second time, of course, remains an open question. Also an open question is whether the "paper of record," *The New York Times*, will have learned any lessons from its own disastrous pre-war coverage.

There are eerie parallels between the administration's media strategy in pushing confrontation with Iran – relying on a series of anonymous leaks to administration-friendly reporters and off-the-record background briefings – and the behavior of the press in the days during the run up to the Iraq war, who displayed an unfailing willingness to vaunt unproven and hawkish claims.

To look at the news cycle in early February, it must have seemed that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad himself was

caught ferrying Iranian-manufactured weapons to Iraqi militants. Newspapers across the country ran various incarnations of the story the White House wanted told, namely that Iran was supplying Iraq with the "deadliest bombs," as read a headline from last week's *Times*.

Most of these stories were based on a single Baghdad press conference, given on Sunday, Feb. 11, by three "anonymous" Pentagon officials. The presentation was delayed several times and was supposed to provide a much-hyped "Iran dossier," charging that "Iranian security forces, taking orders from the 'highest levels' of the Iranian government, are funneling sophisticated explosives to extremist groups in Iraq, and the weapons have grown increasingly deadly for U.S.-led troops over the past two years."

In order to attend the briefing, journalists had to surrender cell phones, tape recorders and cameras. Instead of the voluminous evidence promised beforehand, journalists were offered a PowerPoint presentation given by the three "anonymous" senior defense officials, along with some examples of a weapon they said Iran was supplying Iraq.

Despite scant evidence and the admission by an anonymous official at the press

conference that there was no smoking gun linking Iran to Iraqi weapons, the *Times* ran the story on page one the following day, in a story by James Glanz entitled, "U.S. Presents Evidence of Iranian Weapons in Iraq."

Even before this Baghdad press conference – surely one of the strangest in recent journalistic history – alarms were sounding over another front-page *Times* story, "Deadliest Bomb in Iraq Made By Iran, U.S. Says," by national security correspondent Michael Gordon. Journalist and author Glen Greenwald summed up the Feb. 10 *Times* piece this way: "The article does nothing, literally, but mindlessly recite administration claims about Iran's weapons-supplying activities without the slightest questioning, investigation, or presentation of ample counter-evidence."

Editor and Publisher, meanwhile, dryly noted that "Gordon wrote with [Judith] Miller the paper's most widely criticized – even by the *Times* itself – WMD story of all, the Sept. 8, 2002, 'aluminum tubes' story that proved so influential, especially since the administration trumpeted it on TV talk shows."

Raw Story, meanwhile, speculated that the Gordon story "appeared to violate [Times' own] policy on using unidentified

A ROGUES GALLERY

From non-existent weapons of mass destruction, to the beginnings of the insurgency to the founding of Iraq's nominal government, the *Times* and the rest of the mass media have found themselves playing catch-up as reality frequently diverges from official spin. Here are a few of the *Times* reporters who have helped make the *Times*'s Iraq coverage what it is:



John Burns: Former tennis partner of George Bush Sr. and the *Times*' longtime Baghdad bureau chief, Burns will be leaving Iraq in the summer of 2007 to serve as London bureau chief. In an interview with Charlie Rose of PBS in February 2007, Burns blithely moved from conversations about his own curly hair to the grim fact that nearly every barber in Baghdad was dead, the victims of unrelenting sectarian violence. In answering the question, 'Was the Iraq war lost?' Burns recently told CSPAN, "I think the honest answer is that we – that we don't know, that the situation is extremely complicated, that it looks pretty dire, but all hope is not exhausted."



Judith Miller: Almost single-handedly personifies what is wrong with modern U.S. journalism. After breathlessly hyping allegations that Iraq possessed WMDs (the rationale for the 2003 invasion) Miller embedded herself with the WMD search team "Met Alpha," where she did her best to convince both herself and *Times* readers that unconventional weapons had been found. At one point, Miller interviewed an anonymous Iraqi scientist in a red baseball cap who "pointed at" a place in the sand where he claimed chemical weapons had been buried. In May 2004, the *Times* would publish a mea culpa in which it retracted four of Miller's major pre-war "scoops." Deeply implicated in the CIA leak case, Miller also spent an 85-day stint in jail in 2005 shielding the identity of vice-presidential staffer Lewis "Scooter" Libby, a close friend, from a special federal prosecutor.

U.S. SAYS HUSSEIN INTENSIFIES QUEST FOR A-BOMB PARTS

EFFORT SPANS 14 MONTHS

New Information Is Central to White House Argument for Urgent Action on Iraq

By MICHAEL R. GORDON and JUDITH MILLER

NY TIMES:
then & now

Sept. 8, 2002, article in the *New York Times*

Deception

5 YEARS AGO THE NEW YORK TIMES USE OF UNNAMED SOURCES HELPED THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION LAUNCH A WAR. IS IT HAPPENING AGAIN?

sources," as it contained no explanation why its sources were granted anonymity.

While the *Times* has a unique role in setting the news agenda, it has not been alone in its shoddy reporting. On Jan. 29, *CBS Evening News* led off a report about Iran's alleged support for Shiite militias in Iraq by claiming that "the U.S. military says it has proof positive" of Iranian involvement in Iraq.

According to Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), both NBC and ABC News aired equally credulous Iraq-Iran coverage. "The most important lesson about the Iraq War for reporters was perhaps the simplest one," FAIR noted. "Don't assume the White House is telling the truth. It's a lesson that many reporters seem to be forgetting now that U.S. officials are escalating their claims about Iran's role in Iraq."

Many of the U.S. government's claims against Iran appear to be far-fetched, if not outright disinformation. Iraq analyst Juan Cole contends that this concerted attempt "to blame these U.S. deaths on Iran is in my view a black psy-ops operation. The most fractious Shi'ites in Iraq [i.e., members of the al-Sadr-aligned

Mahdi Army] are the ones who hate Iran the most," Cole concludes.

Extensive information also exists that for the last year and a half, Sunni insurgents have been using so-called "shaped charges," of the type purportedly being smuggled into Iraq by Iran. "If 25 percent of U.S. troops are being killed and wounded by explosively formed projectiles (EFPs)," notes Cole, "then someone should look into who is giving those EFPs to Sunni Arab guerrillas. It isn't Iran."

Even if Iran and the United States somehow were to reach a political settlement, that wouldn't stop the primary cause of U.S. troop deaths in Iraq: overwhelming Iraqi opposition to the U.S. military presence in the country. A September 2006 World Public Opinion poll found that more than two-thirds of all Iraqis, including 71 percent of the Shia and more than 90 percent of the Sunnis wanted U.S. forces to withdraw in a year. And more than 60 percent of all Iraqis supported attacks on coalition troops. "If Iran did not exist, U.S. troops would still be being blown up in large numbers," says Cole. "Sunni guerrillas in al-Anbar and West Baghdad are responsible for most of [their] deaths."

To be fair, many mainstream media outlets seem aware of their own shoddy reportorial past and appear at least partially con-

scious of the fact that they are being played. But the U.S. press – reliant as it is on outdated notions of objectivity and official sources to "tell it like it is" – is poorly placed to call proven liars liars. Disgraced ex-*Times* reporter Judith Miller spoke for many journalists when she told a Berkeley audience in 2005 that, with regard to sources, "You go with what you've got." Or, as University of Texas journalism professor Robert Jensen put it in ZNet, "The way in which contemporary mainstream journalists gather facts about the world privileges those things that can be documented, especially from 'credible' and 'authoritative' sources."

The parroting, in fact, continues. On Feb. 14, President Bush told a packed news conference the Iranian government had directed improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to Shi'ite insurgents in Iraq, contributing directly to the deaths of U.S. troops. "I can say with certainty that the Quds Force, a part of the Iranian government, has provided these sophisticated IEDs that have harmed our troops," Bush said.

Once again, *The New York Times* ran a front-page article on the conference. The headline? "Bush Declares Iran's Arms Role in Iraq Is Certain."

How to Get the Story Wrong

Mindless war-cheerleading hasn't been the only journalism sin committed by the august *New York Times*. Here's a brief trip through some of the low points in the Grey Lady's checkered history.

1930s: As Soviet dictator Josef Stalin engages in a massive crackdown on dissidents and forcibly collectivizes thousands of farms, the *Times* correspondent Walter Duranty, an open Stalin sympathizer, repeatedly argues in his reports that there is no Ukrainian famine. The famine is later reported to have killed more than 10 million people. Duranty's coverage wins a Pulitzer Prize in 1932.

1946: The *Times*' reporter William Laurence writes a series of articles on the development of the atomic bomb and its use on the Japanese city of Nagasaki. In 1945, Lawrence denies on the front page of the *Times* that radiation fallout was to blame for what other journalists were calling "the atomic plague" or "bomb sickness." Lawrence later brags about being on the payroll of the War Department at the time his A-Bomb stories were written. Laurence's coverage wins a Pulitzer Prize in 1946.

1950s: Amid McCarthy era witch-hunts, the *Times* buckles under pressure and fires employees who were once communists. Publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger himself pens an op-ed that strongly criticizes witnesses' use of the Fifth Amendment before the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

1950s–1970s: In *The Power Broker*, historian Robert Caro slams the *Times* for its uncritical support of Robert Moses, an infamous city planner widely reviled for his massive destruction of New York City neighborhoods. Caro writes that the *Times* "fell down on its knees before [Moses] and stayed there year after year."

1993: In order to back up its uncompromisingly positive pro-North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) coverage, the *Times* solicits advertisers to publish "advertisorials" "educating" the public on NAFTA's merits.

2002: In an editorial titled "Hugo Chavez Departs," the *Times*' editorial board salutes the American-backed coup that briefly drove the democratically elected President from power. "With yesterday's resignation of President Hugo Chavez, Venezuelan democracy is no longer threatened by a would-be dictator," the *Times* writes on April 13. Once the coup fails, the *Times* writes again on April 16 that the paper somehow "overlooked the undemocratic manner in which he was removed." —C.A.

Bill Keller: The executive editor of *The New York Times*, who, as a columnist in 2003, supported the invasion of Iraq and called himself a member of the "I Can't Believe I'm a Hawk Club." Two days after the war began, Keller called upon Secretary of State Colin Powell to resign because of the general's support for continued U.N. diplomacy. Keller favorably referred to then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz as the "Sunshine Warrior." Five months later, Keller assumed the executive editor's position in the aftermath of the chaos surrounding the Jayson Blair plagiarism scandal. Keller later faced a Blair-esque crisis of his own with disgraced reporter Judith Miller. Keller stood behind Miller for months in her battle with CIA leak prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald before abruptly engineering her resignation (and handsome severance package) in October 2005.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY FRANK REYNOSO

More than a decade after Saddam Hussein agreed to give up weapons of mass destruction, Iraq has stepped up its quest for nuclear weapons and has embarked on a worldwide hunt for materials to make an atomic bomb, Bush administration officials said today. In the last 14 months, Iraq has sought to buy thousands of specially designed aluminum tubes, which American officials believe were intended as components of centrifuges to enrich uranium.

— "THREATS AND RESPONSES: THE IRAQIS; U.S. SAYS HUSSEIN INTENSIFIES QUEST FOR A-BOMB PARTS" Sept. 8, 2002

Michael R. Gordon and Judith Miller

The Central Intelligence Agency said today that Iraq had taken advantage of the withdrawal of United Nations weapons inspectors to resume the production of chemical arms, expand efforts to develop biological weapons and revive its program to make nuclear arms.

— "THREATS AND RESPONSES: INTELLIGENCE; C.I.A. SAYS IRAQ REVIVED FORBIDDEN WEAPONS PROGRAMS AFTER THE U.N. INSPECTORS LEFT."

Oct. 5, 2002

Michael R. Gordon

In interviews, civilian and military officials from a broad range of government agencies provided specific details to support what until now has been a more generally worded claim, in a new National Intelligence Estimate, that Iran is providing "lethal support" to Shiite militants in Iraq.

— "DEADLIEST BOMB IN IRAQ IS MADE BY IRAN, U.S. SAYS"

Michael R. Gordon

Feb. 10, 2007



After weeks of internal debate, senior United States military officials on Sunday literally put on the table their first public evidence of the contentious assertion that Iran supplies Shiite extremist groups in Iraq with some of the most lethal weapons in the war. They said those weapons had been used to kill more than 170 Americans in the past three years.

— "U.S. SAYS ARMS LINK IRANIANS TO IRAQI SHIITES"

James Glanz

Feb. 12, 2007

Prize of the Century

MAJOR OIL COMPANIES READY TO CLAIM IRAQI RESOURCES

BY A.K. GUPTA

For almost four years, Western oil companies have waited at the altar for Iraq, eager to get their hands on its proven reserves of 115 billion barrels. Iraq has the third-largest reserves in the world behind Canada and Saudi Arabia, but this just scratches the sand. After almost 30 years of war and sanctions, large parts of Iraq remain little explored and there may be more than 200 billion barrels of undiscovered oil under its desert.

Despite its promise, Iraq has been unable to develop new production under the U.S. occupation and has instead seen exports plummet. To boost oil output, the Iraqi government has been wrangling over a new hydrocarbon law for almost a year. Until issues over regional control and revenue sharing are ironed out, the majors, as the big Western oil companies are known, are stuck on the sidelines.

The law, which may be unveiled in March after months of delays, has the Bush administration's fingerprints all over it. It's being sold as the best way for Iraq to increase its oil revenues, but, probably to no one's surprise, it's designed to benefit oil companies.

U.S. officials contend that the law "will be a model for cooperation in the country," according to United Press International (UPI). But this is dubious. The law has been held up by Kurdish parties keen to annex the oil-rich city of Kirkuk in the north. The Kurdish Regional Government maintains that it must be allowed "to negotiate and sign new contracts within the region and to receive its fair share of Iraq's oil revenue."

If the Kurds get their way it would give them an economic basis for an independent state and possibly lead to the breakup of Iraq. Shia parties in the south, where oil reserves are even more abundant, are also looking to form a breakaway region.

A breakup of Iraq would lead to more warfare, legal disputes over the oil and possibly even a regional war that could prevent access for years. The Bush administration wants central government control over the oil so Western companies can get easy and undisputed access. Ironically, the White House's greed is the one reason Iraq hasn't disintegrated.

PROFIT BOOM

In January, *The Independent* (UK) reported that it had "obtained an early draft which was circulated to oil companies in July 2006." The proposed law would be a bonanza for the majors. According to *The Independent*, "While the costs are being recovered, companies will be able to recoup 60 to 70 per cent of revenue; 40 per cent is more usual." The majors could thus receive nearly twice as much revenue during the cost-recovery phase as normal. Iraq's draft law also allows for a 20 percent profit rate once costs have been recouped, as opposed to a 10 percent norm for production sharing agreements (PSAs).

Iraqi oilfields currently in production would not be affected by a new law, but only 17 of 80 known fields, representing 40 billion barrels, are pumping oil. This leaves more than 70 billion barrels in known reserves that may be gifted to the majors, plus all the undiscovered fields.

The majors would gain control through PSAs, which grant generous terms to oil companies to develop new fields. Many analysts are critical of PSAs; one analyst with the International Energy Agency estimated only 12 percent of the world's reserves are subject to such agreements.

Greg Muttitt, author of *Crude Designs: The Rip-Off of Iraq's Oil Wealth*, notes that while PSAs are "quite common in countries with small oil reserves and/or high extraction costs... PSAs are not found in any other country comparable to Iraq."

Countries with enormous reserves of oil, such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Mexico, do not allow PSAs. In recent years, some of the few large oil producers with PSAs, like Russia and Venezuela, have moved away from them because of the unfavorable terms. The trend has been toward re-nationalization of oil, which the majors are fighting.

THE PRIZE

Getting access to Iraq's oil would be the prize of the century for the majors — at least 10 percent of global reserves and perhaps as much as one quarter.

Before the U.S. invasion, some oil companies were licking their chops. In Feb. 2003, the *Financial Times* reported that the "unusu-

Weeks later, in February 2001, Dick Cheney's Energy Task Force began meeting with Exxon Mobil, BP, Conoco, Shell and other majors. The task force was supposedly drawing up a national energy policy, but at the time, Cheney was poring over a map of "Iraqi oilfields, pipelines, refineries and terminals" and charts detailing "foreign suitors" for Iraq's abundant oil and gas reserves. It's not known what was being discussed by the task force and the oil companies, but it probably wasn't solar power.

Little came of this until Sept. 11. Then the Bush administration swung into action almost overnight. On Sept. 13, Donald Rumsfeld ordered Army planners "to sketch a plan to seize and hold Iraq's southern oilfields," according to *New York Times* reporter Michael Gordon and Gen. Bernard E. Trainor, authors of *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq*.

Then in April 2003, the Future of Iraq Project, set up by the Bush adminis-

reserves there, but we cannot think about investing." Bodman added that the executives told him they wanted "a more secure environment and the establishment of a hydrocarbon law. Both are required. Both are necessary."

Also involved in drafting a new oil law is BearingPoint, Inc., a Virginia-based firm that received a \$240 million U.S. contract for Iraq to develop "a competitive private sector." UPI reported on Dec. 28, 2006, that BearingPoint had been "contracted by the United States" to negotiate "a federal oil law."

According to Muttitt, the Iraqi oil legislation has been made available to outside groups, but not the Iraqi public. Muttitt told *The Independent*, "The draft went to the U.S. government and major oil companies in July, and to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in September. [In December] I met a group of 20 Iraqi MPs in

How much blood for oil?

115 billion barrels of oil reserves in Iraq
42 gallons per barrel
= 4.83 trillion gallons of oil

770 Civilian contractors
3,140 American troops
256 International troops
93 International journalists
37 Media support workers
900,000 Iraqis*
= 904,296 total deaths

1 gallon of blood per body
= 904,296 total gallons of blood

Oil price February 2007 = \$59
x 115 billion barrels in Iraq
= 6.785 trillion dollars in oil

Divided by total number of war fatalities
= \$7,503,074.21 in oil wealth gained for each gallon of blood lost

Sources: icasualties.org; *Lancet Report*
*Estimated Iraqi casualties as of February 2007, based upon the research of scientists at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (*The Lancet*, 10/11/06)



ally blunt" chairman of ConocoPhillips commented about Iraq, "We know where the best reserves are [and] we covet the opportunity to get those some day."

The amount of profit depends on the specifics of Iraq's oil law. Using "conservative assumptions," Muttitt estimated in *Crude Designs* that Iraq could lose up to \$194 billion over 30 years from just "12 of Iraq's oilfields that have been listed as priorities for investment under production sharing agreements."

These numbers were based on oil at \$40 a barrel. With a barrel of oil averaging more than \$60 in the past year, this could mean more than \$300 billion in profits for the majors from the 12 Iraqi oilfields alone.

LONG-TIME PLOTTING

In 2004, former U.S. Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill revealed to *60 Minutes* that barely ten days after Bush was inaugurated, invading and occupying Iraq was the top item in White House and National Security Council meetings. "From the very first instance, it was about Iraq. It was about what we can do to change this regime," O'Neill claimed.

tration to plan for the occupation, finished a report recommending privatizing Iraq's national oil industry. It also suggested issuing "vouchers to all Iraqi citizens" and proposed PSAs as the cure-all for Iraq's limited oil production, social ills and revenue shortfalls.

Gaining access to oil has been slowed by the lack of a legal framework. Once a permanent Iraqi government was seated in June 2006, a new oil law was the White House's top priority. Bush visited Iraq days after the new government took power. According to a June 15 report from *Platt's Oilgram News*, "Bush said energy in Iraq was a central topic of discussions during his meeting earlier this week with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki." Bush also announced that he was dispatching Secretary of Energy Samuel Bodman to Iraq. Bodman said "he would bring technical experts from the Department of Energy to help the Iraqis develop" a new hydrocarbon law.

The following month Bodman delivered a message to Iraq's oil minister "from senior U.S. oil executives." The newsletter *Inside Energy* reported the message was "We are interested. ... There are a lot of

Jordan, and I asked them how many had seen the legislation. Only one had."

The struggle over Iraq's oil is about who it is for. For the Bush administration, the oil should serve as a profit stream for Western capital. It appears that many in the Iraqi government, who stay in power only with U.S. force behind them, agree. But like the grand plans to privatize Iraq's economy four years ago, it may remain a pipedream. The armed resistance has shown that chaos is the only constant, and it will be a long time before anyone gets their hands on Iraq's oil.

* * *

As *The Indypendent* goes to press, a new version of the Iraq oil law was published on the web by Iraqi bloggers. It appears even more favorable to the major oil companies than previous reports indicated. The public version is nearly 30 pages and doesn't yet include key appendices that outline the specifics of Iraq's oilfields and reserves and who will control them.

For more analysis by A.K. Gupta see indypendent.org

Christian Right Has U.N. In Sight

UNDOING REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM: CHRISTIAN RIGHT NGOs TARGET THE UNITED NATIONS, FROM PUBLIC EYE.ORG
BY PAM CHAMBERLAIN (DECEMBER 2006)

BY ELEANOR BADER

Undoing Reproductive Freedom: Christian Right NGOs Target the United Nations addresses a frightening and increasingly effective trend in anti-woman organizing. Compiled by Political Research Associates (PRA), a Boston-based nonprofit research center that has monitored the religious and secular right wing for 25 years, the report zeroes in on a host of conservative Christian groups that have turned their gaze on international affairs.

Going beyond distributing Bibles to the world's heathens, Protestant and Catholic fundamentalists have begun lobbying at the United Nations. Their efforts, says the December 2006 report, have created "a vocal anti-abortion, anti-reproductive health presence at the U.N., both by gaining consultative status as NGOs and through Bush administration appointments to official U.N. delegations, special U.N. meetings, and special sessions." Furthermore, they have succeeded in publicizing their belief that a fetus's right to life is basic to human dignity, and have portrayed advocates of abortion access and reproductive health as crazies, hell-bent on demanding what they call "special rights."

A NEW KIND OF GOD

Twelve groups have established non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at the United Nations, among them the American Life League, the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute (C-FAM), Concerned Women for America, the Family Research Council, Focus on the Family, the National Right-to-Life Committee, and the Holy See. While some organizations are less active than others, all are united in opposing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and have stepped up their work to insert abstinence-only language into programmatic attempts to stop HIV/AIDS. They are also devoted to making sure abortion remains outside the rubric of mainstream health concerns.

According to the PRA study, these NGOs have made notable headway. "In 2003 and again in 2005, the U.S. House of Representatives blocked \$500 million in international family planning funds destined for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), falsely claiming that the funds would go to Chinese women aborting pregnancies to comply with China's one family, one child population policy. In 2002, the United States also froze \$3 million in aid to the World Health Organization because the U.N. agency conducts research on safe abortion techniques," it reports.

The right-wing NGOs' most recent bugaboo is the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was adopted by the U.N. General Assembly Dec. 12, 2006. "This is the first time the phrase 'sexual and reproductive health' appeared in a binding treaty," says C-FAM's weekly newsletter. The shift has sent the group into apoplexy, and members are lobbying U.N. delegates to oppose the inclusion of abortion in the phrase "reproductive health," some-

thing most would assume is a given.

C-FAM's reaction was bolstered by the Holy See, which, predictably, objected to the signing of the disability convention, "because in some countries, reproductive health services include abortion, thus denying the inherent right to life of every human being." Twenty countries have to ratify the document for it to take effect; ten have already joined C-FAM in denouncing the inclusion of choice: Canada, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Egypt, Iran, Libya, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Syria and Uganda.

THE OLD WORLD ORDER

While virtually all anti-choice groups see the United Nations as anti-American, C-FAM is particularly vitriolic in its hatred of the organization and calls the UNFPA "an assault on the world's people." In a diatribe that reads almost like a satirical article in *The Onion*, the group's website, www.c-fam.org, lays out the organization's agenda: fighting the secular humanism at the heart of international social justice movements. "For one side in this clash the sexual/marital act is a most intimate issue, leading to the most prized of all human conditions – the new family, center of love and affection, focus of deepest desires and most strenuous of efforts," it rails. "For the other side the sexual/marital act is the most promising battleground on which to overturn this old world order, the old universal family order that stands in the way of the dreams of scientific socialist controlled utopia of just the right number of people, of health, efficiency and plenty. UNFPA is to the fore on one side only."

Concerned Women for America is similarly bizarre, decrying feminist NGOs for promulgating "ridiculous demands for equal participation for men and women in decision making at all levels." They have joined their colleagues in an ideological challenge to CEDAW and urge members to sign a petition, crafted by C-FAM, against U.S. ratification of it. Its reasoning? "The treaty has been used as a vehicle for ideas that are dangerous to our countries, our families, our mothers and daughters."

It all sounds laughable, until you realize that the United Nations provides an international forum for the ramblings of U.S.-based religious conservatives. "If the United States continues to provide a platform for the Christian Right at international meetings," the PRA report concludes, "then in the next three to eight years we may see the advances made by human rights activists over the past two decades undermined, or at least stalled."

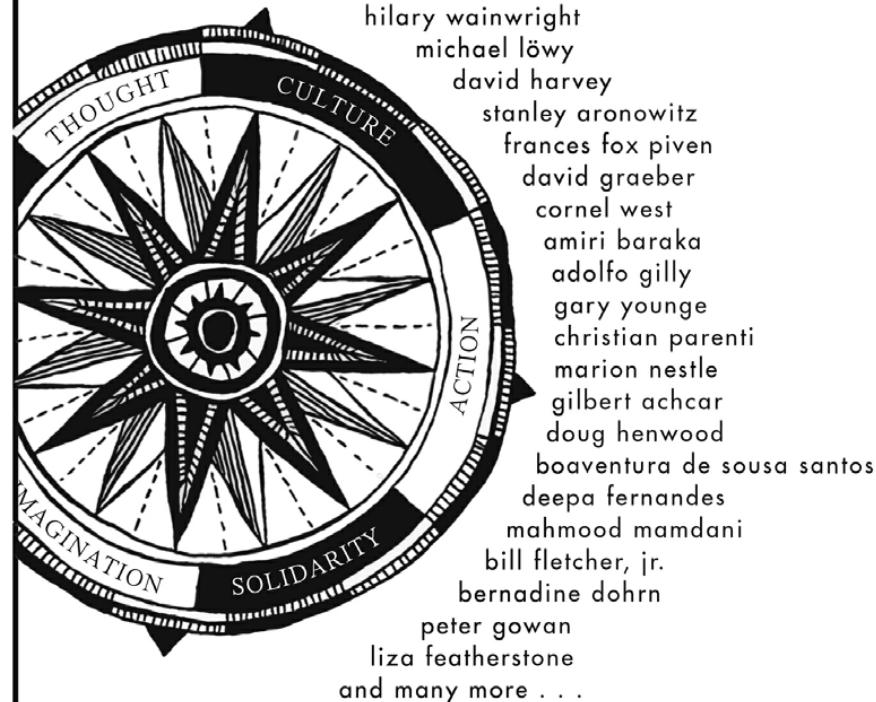
Most on the left lambaste the United Nations as ineffective, slow-moving and overly conciliatory—which it is. But *Undoing Reproductive Freedom* reminds us of the roadblocks that stymie its potential. It is mandatory reading for all reproductive rights and health activists, alerting us to organizing that is largely under the radar of progressives and feminists.

Undoing Reproductive Freedom, by Pam Chamberlain, is available on the PRA website, www.publiceye.org.

left forum 2007

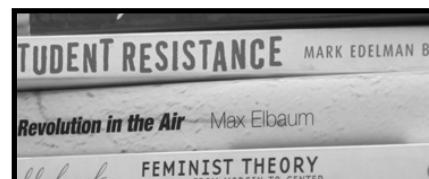
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SAT., FEB. 24TH @ NOON
ROAD SHOW: GRAFFITI NYC
Exhibition bringing the work of today's local graffiti artists back to the streets, focusing on the role that the form has been relegated to by contemporary artistic culture. Timed to coincide with the release of the book *Graffiti NYC*, with artists and works drawn from its pages.

TUES., FEB. 27TH @ 7PM - \$3-\$5 SUGG
WOMEN'S POETRY JAM & OPEN MIC
Featured Writers: Joy Ladin & Joanne Pagano Weber

Joy Ladin is currently working on *Transmigration*, a collection of poems that explore the breakdown and regeneration of psyche, identity and relationships.

Joanne Pagano Weber will read from her novel-in-progress, *Model V*, about the parallel journeys of a young artist and the emerging master for whom she is an exclusive model.

WED., FEB. 28TH @ 7PM - \$5 SUGG
SCREENING: IRAQ FOR SALE: THE WAR PROFITEERS

Documentary uncovering the connections between the private corporations in Iraq and the officials who make it possible. Followed by a discussion with members of the NYC chapter of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

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reviews

FILM

Africa is Rich

BAMAKO

ABDERRAHMANE SISSAKO (2006)
FEB. 14-27 AT THE FILM FORUM

Bamako, a film about the effects of 25 years of structural adjustment on the Malian people, has been categorized as a drama and then criticized as didactic. The latter is so overwhelmingly true it is irrelevant; the viewer should understand that this is no drama in the traditional sense. True, there are a couple weakly realized plots in the background, such as the impending divorce of a beautiful lounge singer and her husband Chako, and the appearance of a detective who suspects Chako of murder. But the film's main focus is a mock trial of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). The lawyers, judges and witnesses are real, and their speeches are not scripted. This is a glimpse into the Malian view, articulately argued in the French colonists' tongue.

Most of the film is set in the courtyard of Sissako's father's house in a humble neighborhood of Bamako, the capital of Mali. As the trial unfolds, children play, adults gossip and do chores, a man lies in his sickbed and there is a wedding. Some are actors and others are members of Sissako's own family. The fictional threads are an attempt to bring the abstract macro-politics of the trial down to the level of the everyday. Sissako succeeds not because of the flimsy narrative development, but because he captures a convincingly realistic snapshot of courtyard life. With the exception of a scene dramatizing the northbound exodus of a witness who lost his job due to IMF-imposed cuts (a scene in which a fellow refugee collapses in the Sahara), this film does not resort to the melodrama common to Western accounts of Africa. The people of Sissako's courtyard are not destitute or whining. They are articulate and they are angry.

While Sissako recognizes the role of local elites in the ransacking of their own continent, he does not let the West off easy. A lawyer defending the World Bank argues that African countries should not be trusted to manage their own development because of



SPLIT ENDS

DIR. LIESL TOMMY
LA MAMA ETC. AND TOURING

Creator/performer Venus Opal Reese.
PHOTO: OLIVIA JACQUET

Kinks in Split Ends

Venus Opal Reese takes on a daunting task with her solo show, *Split Ends: the history of black women's hair in America*. She employs dance, song, spoken word, and video footage compiled from more than 100 interviews with Black women about their hair. Her spellbinding stage presence brings to life an array of characters, from a drag queen to a small child to victims of cancer and rape. She excites audience participation, asking questions and demanding responses and even brings a few on stage as characters.

However, an essential element is missing: the history.

In her opening piece, Reese declares, "White people ain't the problem, you [Black people] the problem." She then produces advertisements for hair straighteners for kinky or curly hair circulated in the Reconstruction Era. The ads appeared in Black publications and Black people made the products. Thus, she concludes that the desire for straight hair and the many complexes that stem therefrom are wholly the fault of African-Americans themselves.

This angle and conclusion are, to put it mildly, flawed. Her exploration should have begun with the hair itself, not a conflict. The first relevant conflict was not about straight hair; it was the struggle to hold on to the West African tradition of covering hair with colorful

prints or head wraps. Still, she neglects to contextualize even the "straightening conflict." The straightening of kinky hair did not develop in a vacuum, but among social pressure for former slaves to "Anglify" themselves, and hair is one of a few race-distinctive features that are also alterable. Moreover, slavery went beyond physical bondage, it included psychological chains that have yet to be unlocked. If the desire for straight hair had not been created from the trauma of slavery and the subsequent subordination of Black Americans, hair straightening would have been a popular practice in pre-colonial Africa.

Instead of "making sense of split ends," as Reese claims to do, this mistake damages them further.

Despite the flaws of the performance, it was refreshing to see a contemporary engagement with Black aesthetic theory, first developed during the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The movement emphasizes art as an agent of revolution and insists that Eurocentric paradigms be replaced with Afrocentric paradigms. Blacks were the primary audience and the movement catered to Black cultural knowledge.

Split Ends embodies this paradigm with hilarious impressions of Tina Turner, Missy Elliott and Patti Labelle. Reese never introduces these women by name, but wears wigs of

their signature hairstyles, lip-syncs their songs and imitates their movements. At one point, she falls on the floor in a violent shaking to mimic Patti Labelle's passionate performance style. She assumes that the audience is familiar with African-American culture. If you're not, you don't get the joke. And there's no apology.

Another highlight is Reese's impersonation of U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Here, Reese wears a wig reminiscent of Rice's bob and a suit jacket. Never naming Rice, she monologues that she was conscious of the two "strikes" against her: race and gender. Thus, she did everything in her power to subvert them. She masked her Southern accent, studied classical music and became an expert in international affairs. Again, she relies on the audience's awareness of Rice's background. In the end, when she stands in front of a flowing image of the U.S. flag with an impeccable replication of Rice's signature half-smile, it is unmistakable.

The play ends with Reese attempting to soothe the audience's conscience because there is no shame in selling yourself. "If you sold it, that means it was yours in the first place... If you had the power to sell it, that means you can buy it back." It's an admirable attempt at empowerment, but makes the lack of history and contextualization all the more disappointing and apparent.

—MARY HEGLAR

corruption. To this, a witness responds that the rampant corruption is minor in comparison with the legal corruption of the West — the theft that has been the driving force behind its relations with Africa since the times of slavery. This corruption is so fundamental to the workings of capitalism

itself that it is called business. Sissako noted that one witness said to him when discussing the West, "At least they'll know that we know." This film aims to show that Malians understand their plight, and, though they are powerless to take the World Bank to court in real life, they have not been broken.

While many of the arguments are similar to those made by Western critics of structural adjustment, the sense of the victims' dignity that Sissako manages to convey would be difficult for a Western filmmaker to portray.

This dignity is evident when one of the witnesses declares that Africa is rich. She is a victim of her wealth, not her poverty; were she poor in resources, the West would leave her alone.

—LEILA BINDER

BOOKS

Fascism, God and the U.S.

AMERICAN FASCISTS:
THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT
AND THE WAR ON
AMERICA

BY CHRIS HEDGES
FREE PRESS, 2007

presented by an organized group of religious fanatics — Christian fascists and extremist evangelicals. The group forms a significant constituency supporting President George W. Bush and in their religious doctrines and political positions advocating totalitarian policies. They support amending the Constitution to make the United States a Christian nation and a definition of liberty as liberation from Satan.

Who is Satan? The devil, the chief of the fallen angels cast out of Heaven by God.

Hedges sounds the alarm: This kind of mumbo-jumbo, or God talk, is endangering rational thought and stimulating pathological trends throughout America. He calls on all Americans "to give up passivity, to challenge aggressively this movement's deluded



appropriation of Christianity and to do everything possible to defend tolerance." But he declares emphatically that it is a grave error to tolerate attacks by Christian radicals, for example, in hate radio broadcasts on Muslims, Jews, immigrants, gays, lesbians, women, scholars, scientists and "secular humanists."

"The radical Christian Right calls for exclusion, cruelty and intolerance in the name of God," he writes.

Democratic and Christian values are being dismantled, often with stealth, by the radical Christian movement known as dominionism. Dominionism takes its name from Genesis 1:26-31, in which God gives human beings "dominion" over all creation; the movement looks to the theocracy John Calvin implanted in Geneva, Switzerland, in the 1500s as its political model.

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia is among those public officials steeped in dominionist ideology. Forty-five senators and 186 members of the House of Representatives earned approval ratings of 80 to 100 percent from the three most influential Christian Right advocacy groups: the Christian Coalition, Eagle Forum and Family Resource Council.

The importance of Hedges' book resides in its exposition of the movement's components, tenets and objectives, however, it comes up short on analysis and contextualization.

While he refers to such earlier works as Sinclair Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here* (1935) and Crane Brinton's *The Anatomy of Revolution* (1965) and to such past pro-fascists as Father Charles E. Coughlin and Gerald L. K. Smith, Hedges does not consider the myths, contradictions and failures of America, the corruption of its officials and institutions, the unknown and uninvestigated influence of organized crime from City Hall to the White House, the militarization of U.S. society or the power of corporations and monopoly capitalism, all of which form the back-

ground to the phenomenon of Christian fascism.

He mentions only briefly the circumstances and events since the end of World War II that have put us in the current fix: the National Security Act of 1947, the political trials of Alger Hiss and numerous others, the blacklists and persecutions, the diminution of the trade union movement, the McCarthy era, the wars and covert actions, and the absurdity of nuclear weapons.

He does include an excellent bibliography for further reading.

Hedges himself is a graduate of the Harvard Divinity School, a former foreign correspondent for *The New York Times*, and the author of *Losing Moses on the Freeway: The 10 Commandments in America* and *What Every Person Should Know About War*.

—DONALD PANETH

COMICS Addicted to War

WAR FIX

WRITTEN BY DAVID AXE
ILLUSTRATED BY STEVE OLEXA
NBM PUBLISHING CO., 2006

First-hand accounts of historical events — like Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Joe Sacco's *Palestine* and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* — established comics as a viable art form capable of addressing complicated issues with genuine insight and scholarly merit. In light of this, *War Fix* (written by David Axe and illustrated by Steve Olexa) comes in as a disappointment.

Little David grew up fixated on the televised broadcasts of the Persian Gulf War. Twelve years later, as a young journalist covering local government in a nameless town in the United States, he

asks his editor to send him to Iraq to cover the upcoming elections. After getting the okay (and dodging a flowerpot flung at him by his enraged girlfriend), David travels to the other side of the world to get his "fix." As an embedded journalist, he dons an expensive flak jacket and camera and wades in among disillusioned U.S. soldiers, bombings and fellow war correspondents, all in a seemingly endless quagmire.

Lacking much historical context for the war, penetrating journalistic inquiries or psychological probing, David sleepwalks through the story as despair and carnage rampage in the periphery. He travels from Baghdad across the Green Zone into Balad to Anaconda and back to Baghdad in a string of pointless scenes. He chats with independent contractors, exchanges awkward pleasantries with U.S. military officers and befriends a BBC reporter whom doctors diagnose as being "addicted to war."

This book offers nothing more informative than what a casual reader could get from a daily newspaper. Even David's plentiful visions of war are cliché, with stereotypical Iraqi women mourning over their loved ones' shattered bodies and exploding cars straight out of last summer's action blockbuster.

Steve Olexa illustrates destruction in gray washes and generous amounts of spot tones in dynamic manga-style. Yet in many scenes, Olexa's use of extreme camera angles and slick design renders the sentiment vacuous. The numerous double-page spreads and free-flowing layout make for difficult reading, dulling the edge the book aspires to.

"God, I'm so bored," David utters while being driven in a truck, echoing my exact thoughts. While publishing a graphic novel on the ongoing Iraq war is commendable, the work is disappointingly superficial. If you want your "fix," just borrow it from the library.

—HUESO TAVERAS

HaymarketBooks
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NO ONE IS ILLEGAL: FIGHTING RACISM AND STATE VIOLENCE ON THE UNITED STATES-MEXICO BORDER

By Mike Davis and Justin Akers Chacón



ISBN 1-931859-35-3 \$14

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Be the Media

Sixteen year-old Tibetan refugee Jigme Sangmo shares her struggles as an immigrant to the United States as part of Bronx International High School's "Struggle to be Strong Community Interviewing Project." On Feb. 15, 65 immigrant teenagers in the Bronx celebrated their courage in the face of discrimination, family conflicts, immigration, poverty and war with the release of their self-published 125-page anthology of stories and interviews with their families, neighbors and each other.

PHOTO: DENNIS HO

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Photograph courtesy of *The Independent*



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